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# The Author of “The Blue Bird.”



By the Editor.



AURICE MAETERLINCK, author of “The Blue Bird,” produced at the New Theatre, New York, is unusual even for a poet, naturalist and writer of essays, in that he has an abundance of common sense and is quite human. Indeed, he is said to have shown himself as canny as the proverbial Scotchman in the negotiations for the placing of the American rights to his play. This may be due to his having studied for the bar. Nor would he have been the first lawyer member of his family. For a Monsieur Maeterlinck, his cousin, successfully represented Whistler in proceedings to suppress a pirated edition of “The Gentle Art of Making Enemies.”

The great nations appear to produce the geniuses of the great emotions—the Dantes, Shakespeares, Goethes, Hugos; the smaller ones the mystics. Are circumscribed boundaries productive of

THE brooding and introspection? The answer is Norway  
LOTUS and Ibsen, Belgium and Maeterlinck. The latter was  
born in Ghent, August 29, 1862.

Physically the poet belongs to Belgium. Mentally he is a denizen of the borderland that fringes upon the unknown and where each word, each gesture, however superficial it appear, has its secondary meaning, its mystical significance. He writes in hints that tell more than a dozen paragraphs; and the mere lifting of a finger is a token compared with which a sawing of the air with arms is as nothing—that is to the imaginative. In "The Blue Bird" the principal characters are two children, a boy and girl. In the crucible of the poet's genius, however, these children become symbols of the human race. The blue bird, for which they seek far and wide, is the happiness for which the world longs. Yet, all the while, the little feathered songster in the cage in the children's home is the bird of their long search. Happiness is already ours—if we but knew it! Others may differ with regard to the meaning of this play. That is what it means to me. For I caught the blue bird long ago.

But to return to Maeterlinck himself, whom I



left in Ghent an infant in arms, for even poets are born as infants and, unlike Maeterlinck, usually remain children the rest of their lives. The future author of "The Blue Bird," after private tuition entered the Jesuit College of St. Barbe at Ghent. It was after his graduation that he took a course in law, and was admitted to the bar. But after one or two court appearances he decided that a barrister's career did not suit him and returned to short story writing. The tales were in the style of De Maupassant. They met with a certain favor in literary circles, though even litterateurs were uncertain as to their real worth. Maeterlinck, however, had two strong supporters whom he had met during his college days, and it was they who gave him courage to continue. These men were the poets Charles Van Leberghe and Gregoire Le Roi.

General acknowledgment came to him in an unusual way. He was twenty-seven, and had written "La Princess Maleine," but could find no publisher. He was about to stow away the manuscript in a pigeonhole, when a friend offered to set up the type for the work, if, when it came to the printing, Maeter-

THE LOTUS linck would turn the crank of the hand press. The poet agreed, and in this way the work was published. This was in 1889. The edition comprised twenty-five copies, and not long after the little books were set in circulation a copy fell into the hands of Octave Mirabeau. Mirabeau was so impressed with the play that he wrote a long review of it in *Le Figaro* of Paris and set the world talking about it. No one was more astounded at this recognition than the poet himself and his literary and other friends. But his own people were scandalized at seeing "the respectable name of Maeterlinck on the title page of a book."

Drawn to Paris, he took modest quarters there and thus succeeded in following his inclination to work in seclusion. He spent much of his time about the quays and bookstalls. Now and then he rode his wheel into the country, but only on such occasions as he needed utter solitude to assimilate what he had read or acquired by personal observation. And a curiously interesting circumstance was that friends who sought him out and succeeded in finding him, invariably remarked that he never seemed to work. He was gently affable, never effusive, always polite, but

never did they come upon him with pen on paper, and they could not understand how book after book came from his hand.



\* \* \*

MAETERLINCK has been described as an artist-philosopher similar to Ibsen and Shaw. But unlike Ibsen he does not trust to action alone to reveal the symbolic lesson of his dramas or to carry his message. Any comparison with Shaw is absurd. Shaw is essentially a "smarty"—a clever juggler with words and philosophies. On the contrary, there is not one smart line in the whole of "The Blue Bird." Maeterlinck's language is direct and plain. It is the situations from which the lines are evolved that give them their poignancy, depth or humor.

Into his earlier dramas Maeterlinck wove the idea of destiny, the unknown determining force of life, accomplishing this with a spiritual sensitiveness more delicate than that displayed by any other modern writer. Having no place for freedom of will, he was very much the fatalist in his early plays. It was all predestination—man swung by destiny.

THE LOTUS      "Pelléas et Melisande," "L'Intruse," "Les Aveugles," "Monna Vanna" and "Sister Beatrice" are plays. "Serres Chaudes" is a volume of poems. "The Treasure of the Humble" and "Wisdom and Destiny" are the English titles of two volumes of essays, the first collection most subtle and elusive, the second a departure from his former fatalism. Wisdom may be said to have come with marriage and to have made the doctrine of foreordination and inexorable fate appear less attractive. For through the pages of "Wisdom and Destiny" one glimpses a woman's figure that his friends would not fail to have identified, even without the exquisite dedication, as Mme. Maeterlinck. "She is a woman of rare intellect and charm, with a touch of genius herself, and she has been the ideal helpmate to her poet husband," writes Alfred Sutro. Before her marriage to Maeterlinck she was Mlle. Georgette Leblanc and on the stage.

For many years the poet has lived in Bruges, called "the city of silence." And "Silence," it may be noted, is one of the most poetic and sensitive essays in his "Treasure of the Humble." The poet's summer home is at Grasse, a little village perched up



near the Mediterranean shore where all spring and summer the air is perfumed by flowers grown for scent. Here he lives much out of doors, and much of his time on a motor cycle, making many excursions among the mountains back of the town. He smiles when he tells how the villagers laugh at him because they consider it incongruous that a poet should ride a motor cycle. But he finds his wheel more convenient than a motor car, saying that one is closer to the road and thus able to see all there is to be seen. Moreover he can frequent the little paths and wood-ways where no motor car can travel. Best of all he can be accompanied by his dog, and the poet is exceedingly fond of dogs—as no one who has read his essays need be told.

Mr. Van Ness Harwood, who fills so ably and agreeably the chair of publicity at The New Theatre, tells me that Maeterlinck dreads the cold and for that reason could not be induced to come over here for the production of "The Blue Bird." Nor has he, in spite of invitations, ever gone to Russia to see his plays produced there.

"Maeterlinck" is formed of two Flemish

**THE LOTUS** words—"Maeten," a measure, and "Linck," meaning "a man whose function is." The poet who so scandalized his family by placing its respectable name on the title page of a book, has made it famous. He has taken the full "Maeten" of the "Linck."

